
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

Is the pasty really Cornish?



BBC
LEARNING
ENGLISH

This is not a word-for-word transcript

Neil

Hello. This is 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. I'm Neil.

Rob

And I'm Rob.

Neil

Fancy a game of 'food connections', Rob? I'll name a place and you say the first food that comes to mind. Ready?

Rob

Yeah, sure, let's go!

Neil

Italy.

Rob

Erm... 'pizza' – or 'lasagne'.

Rob

New York?

Neil

'Hot dogs', of course. Or maybe 'bagels'. How about... Cornwall from the UK?

Rob

If it's Cornwall, it must be the famous 'Cornish pasty', right?

Neil

That's right! Cornwall, the region which forms the south-western tip of Britain, is as famous for its pasties as New York is for hot dogs. In this programme we'll be finding out all about Cornish pasties. We'll hear how it's gone from humble

beginnings to become a symbol of Cornish identity and spread around the world to Jamaica, Argentina and Brazil.

Rob

But what exactly is a pasty, Neil? Somewhere between a pie and a sandwich, right? A piece of pastry which is turned over and crimped along the side to make two corners...

Neil

... and filled with different ingredients - which brings me to my quiz question for today, Rob. What is the traditional filling in an authentic Cornish pasty? Is it:

- a) Chicken, avocado and brie
- b) Beef, potato and turnip
- c) Pork, onion and chorizo

Rob

Well, chorizo is Spanish isn't it? And avocado with brie doesn't sound traditionally Cornish, so I'll say b) beef, potato and turnip.

Neil

OK, Rob. We'll find out later if you were right. What's for sure is that the Cornish pasty has had a long history as BBC Radio 4's The Food Programme discovered. They spoke to Dr Polly Russell, a public life curator at the British Library. Here she is reading from one of the earliest mentions of pasties from the late 17th century:

Polly Russell, Public Life Curator, British Library

There's a lovely bit here where he's describing what a housewife in Hertfordshire does and he's talking about her way to make pork pies and pork pasties: pies may be made and baked either raised in paste earthen pans or in **pewter dishes** or in the shape of a turnover, two-cornered pasties. So that's a very early reference to a pasty in the shape, I think, that we know it but also being made specifically for **labourers** - to be feeding labourers on a farm at **harvest time**.

Rob

The earliest pasties were made in **pewter dishes** – a traditional cooking plate made of a silver-coloured metal called 'pewter'.

Neil

And they were eaten by agricultural **labourers** – workers doing physical farm work during **harvest** time – the weeks in autumn when crops like wheat are cut and collected from the fields.

Rob

But it wasn't only farmers and labourers who ate pasties. As well as its farms and fishing, Cornwall was famous for tin mines, as Ruth Huxley of the Cornish Pasty Association explains:

Ruth Huxley, Cornish Pasty Association

Pasties would have been eaten by lots of people who went to work but it just worked perfectly down mines, and Cornwall became the world capital of **mining**. And so lots of pasties were made, lots of pasties were eaten and then that mining community went all over the world and took the pasty with them.

Neil

Pasties were eaten by hungry workers involved in the **mining** industry - digging up materials such as coal or metals like gold, or in Cornwall tin, from the ground.

Rob

So far we've been talking about Cornwall. But you said the Cornish pasty has spread around the world, Neil. How did that happen?

Neil

Well, that's connected to the tin miners we just talked about. Here's Polly Russell again:

Polly Russell, Public Life Curator, British Library

This is **replicated**, not just in Mexico but with migrants moving to America, to Minnesota, to Canada, to Australia. So anyone who travels to many of those places now will see foods which are incredibly **reminiscent** and familiar and just like Cornish pasties.

Neil

In the 19th century, many Cornish tin miners emigrated, moving abroad to start a better life. Their pasty recipes were **replicated** – or copied exactly, in the new places where they landed, from America to Australia.

Rob

And that's why in many places around the world you can find food which is **reminiscent of** pasties – meaning it reminds you of something similar, in this case the original Cornish pasty... with its traditional filling of... what's was your quiz question again, Neil?

Neil

Ah, yes. I asked you what the traditional Cornish pasty filling was? You said...

Rob

I said b) beef, potato and turnip.

Neil

And you were right! 'Keslowena', Rob – that's Cornish for 'congratulations'!

Rob

'Heb grev', Neil – that's 'no problem'!

Neil

In fact those other fillings – chorizo, avocado and brie - really did feature in pasties entered for this year's Annual World Pasty Championships, held in Cornwall every spring. Other pasty-inspired ideas include Argentinian chimichurri *empanadas* and spicy Jamaican *patties*.

Rob

So the pasty is still going strong, both in Cornwall and around the world.

Neil

Today we've been discussing Cornish pasties – a kind of filled pastry from the south-west of England, originally made in **pewter dishes** – a silver-coloured metal dish.

Rob

Pasties were eaten by agricultural **labourers** – farm workers bringing in the autumn **harvest** – the time when crops are cut and collected from the fields, and also by workers in the tin **mining** industry – digging up metals like tin from underground.

Neil

Later, when these miners emigrated to new lands, pasties were **replicated** – cooked again in the same way.

Rob

In fact Cornish miners moved to so many new countries that today, almost every corner of the world has food **reminiscent of** – or reminding you of, the original Cornish pasty.

Neil

That's all for today. Join us again soon for more topical discussion and vocabulary on 6 Minute English. Bye for now!

Rob

Bye.

VOCABULARY

pewter dishes

traditional dishes made from a silver-coloured metal called pewter

labourers

people who do physical work, especially outdoors

harvest

the time of year when crops like wheat or barley are cut and collected from the fields

mining

digging up materials such as coal, diamonds or metals like gold and tin from the ground

replicated

done again in exactly the same way

reminiscent (of)

making you remember a particular person, place or thing